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Highlands Council Decision Determines Beneficial Future of Former Landfill

*Landfill capped and designated for solar use; Highlands Council plan
implementation benefits New Jersey*

CHESTER, NJ – Implementing the Highlands Regional Master Plan’s commitment to protect, restore and enhance environmental protection in the Highlands Region and to ensure a sound and responsible energy future that stimulates the economy, today the Highlands Council approved the redevelopment of a long neglected landfill in Roxbury and the construction of solar arrays capable of generating between 8 to 10 megawatts of electrical power. The site, which will be remediated consistent with State’s landfill closure requirements, was designated by the Highlands Council today as a Highlands Redevelopment Area and approved for renewable energy development.

The Highlands Council included goals in the Regional Master Plan to encourage this type of redevelopment in the region. Specifically, the Plan encourages green energy development on brown fields. “Many Highlands Plan goals were achieved today,” said Vice Chairman Jack Schrier. “Notably, we saw on this site an opportunity to turn a long neglected dumpsite, one that is leaching contaminants into the ground and waterways, into a remediated site with a beneficial reuse. We want this to be a model for other locations in the Highlands Region, and to that end we will continue to partner with the state, Highlands municipalities and applicants to ensure that positive results are achieved.”

The Roxbury property that contains the landfill encompasses approximately 102 acres, of which approximately 60 acres had been utilized for landfilling activities from the early 1950s to the late 1970s. At the Council meeting today the public saw photos of the site spanning the years from

when it was operated as a landfill, years when it languished unremediated, abandoned and overgrown, to its current state today cleared for remediation to occur. The property is bounded by the Morris Canal Park to the north and northeast, housing developments to the northwest and west, Mountain Road to the south, and Ledgewood Park to the east. The proposed solar energy project will be preceded by the capping and final closure of the landfill, which did not occur in 1979 when operations ceased. Following the proper closure of the landfill, the proposal is to redevelop the area designated as the Highlands Redevelopment Area by placing photovoltaic panels on top of the constructed landfill cap using non-penetrating structures to maintain cap integrity. This will become one of the largest solar sites in New Jersey with the ability to produce between 8 and 10 megawatts of power depending on the final site plan.

The Highlands Council considered public comment and worked with Roxbury Township professionals to address municipal concerns. Mayor Jim Rilee recused himself as Chair of the Highlands Council so that he could work with his Township Committee to address issues noted by the municipality and their residents. In particular, the Council added conditions to address scenic impacts and environmental protections and considered these issues in determining the conditions of the Highlands Redevelopment Area. The Council noted that the project did receive support from some environmental groups while others expressed some concerns. All comments and responses may be found on this page of the Highlands Council website.

“The Highlands Council’s role in projects such as this ensures that we provide a regional perspective in examining all the issues related to redevelopment” said Executive Director, Eileen Swan. “It is critical that while we view the site with the goals of the State’s Energy Master Plan in mind that we also examine issues from a regional and local perspective and address the concerns of all in determining the resulting Highlands Redevelopment Area.”

The project, having gained the designation from the Highlands Council, qualifies for a Highlands Preservation Area Approval from the NJDEP. The Highlands Council will stay involved to assist in moving the project forward and making sure that all required conditions are met. This is the eighth Highlands Redevelopment Area Designation by the Highlands Council but the first that involves a Brownfield site.

Today’s action by the Highlands Council do not take effect until 10 business days after a copy of the minutes of the meeting have been delivered to the Governor to allow time for his review and consideration.